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CIA Aide Had Contra, Iran Roles

Clarridge Took Over Antiterrorism Unit

By Walter Pincus
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The same top official of the Central Intelligence Agency who in 1981 designed the original secret program to aid Nicaraguan rebels and worked along with the National Security Counsel staff's Lt. Col. Oliver L. North on the controversial 1984 mining of Nicaraguan harbors has also been involved in the clandestine Iran arms operation, according to informed sources.

The official, Duane (Dewey) Clarridge, a favorite of CIA Director William J. Casey, took over the CIA counterterrorism section in January 1986. On Jan. 17, President Reagan approved a secret intelligence "finding" that authorized the clandestine shipment of U.S. arms from Pentagon stocks to Iran via Israel.

Casey not only helped draft the finding but also selected Clarridge's counterterrorism section at the CIA to supply assistance to the NSC, the sources said. North ran the program on behalf of the NSC.

The Jan. 17 finding was kept secret from Congress and from key NSC members, including Secretary of State George P. Shultz. The finding was not even officially discussed in the interagency counterterrorism group, which was organized to handle efforts to prevent terrorism and free American hostages. Clarridge was the CIA representative on the group and North was the NSC member.

"The CIA representative [Clarridge] was the only one who really knew" about the Iranian arms deals, one source aware of the interagency panel said yesterday.

Before taking over the counterterrorism unit, Clarridge ran the CIA's European operations. Two sources identified him as the agency official whom North contacted in November 1985 to ask approval for a CIA plane to carry an Israeli shipment of arms from Lisbon to Iran.

The CIA approved North's request, and the Israeli shipment of U.S. Hawk antiaircraft missiles was delivered to Iran. At the time, the shipment was described as oil drilling equipment.

It is still unclear who gave the final authorization for the CIA to provide the plane, since Casey was in China at the time. His deputy, however, said it may have violated the law since there was no presidential authority for shipping arms to Iran.

Clarridge's participation adds another player to the growing cast of characters who have worked both on the administration's secret efforts in behalf of the contras and to ship arms to Iran as part of a policy to win the release of American hostages and seek influence with factions in the Iranian government.

Casey, who is scheduled to testify before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on Tuesday, cut off the agency's area and Iran country experts from the operation, sources said.

In other developments yesterday:

- Congressional leaders investigating the Iran-contra scandal largely rejected granting immunity to North and former Reagan national security adviser John M. Poindexter. Both men have refused to testify before various congressional committees, invoking their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, called immunity for North and Poindexter "premature at this point."

Senate intelligence committee Chairman David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.) called on the two men to testify openly. "It's like a jigsaw puzzle," he said of the investigation. "I've got 95 of the pieces and if I just had Ollie North and John Poindexter to put the rest of them in there, we'd have it."

- Marlin Fitzwater, Vice President Bush's press secretary, told United Press International that Bush has asked his national security aide, Donald P. Gregg, to provide a chronology by today of his contacts with Felix Rodriguez, a former CIA operative who was active in the network that resupplied the contras with arms and humanitarian aid.

Bush has admitted meeting Rodriguez, also known as Max Gomez, but said his discussions involved only Rodriguez's activities in behalf of the government of El Salvador. Gregg said over the weekend he set up a meeting for Rodriguez with officials from the CIA, State and Defense departments to share Rodriguez's concerns that the contras might run out of aid.

"At this point there is no indication of any wrongdoing on Don's part," Fitzwater told UPI. "Our intention is to get all the information out about Don Gregg and his contacts so there can be no question about his role."

- Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) said Reagan should bring in "someone like [former Senate majority leader] Howard Baker" to advise him on the scandal.
- Ambassador to Lebanon John H. Kelly, who was interviewed Saturday by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, is expected to return to his post in a few weeks following appearances before congressional committees investigating the Iran-and-hostages affair, State Department officials said yesterday. Shultz has issued no final order sending Kelly back to his post but officials anticipated this will be done in the near future.

Kelly was recalled to Washington after Shultz reported he was "shocked" to learn that Kelly has been in contact with the National Security Council about the Iran affair without his knowledge.

Clarridge was handpicked by Casey in 1981 to run the Latin American division, and by 1983 was overseeing the direction of the contra force of nearly 10,000 men. After Congress discovered the mining operation in the spring of 1984 and later approved amendments barring military aid to the contras, Clarridge was transferred to the European post. He was moved to the counterterrorism position within weeks of Reagan's decision to approve the clandestine Iran sales program.

Clarridge has the same free-wheeling approach to operations that has been attributed to North,

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according to sources who have worked with both of them. Like North, one official said yesterday, Clarridge is "a very skillful operative."

Casey had earlier provided assistance when the Iranian initiative first began in the summer of 1985. Then-national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane sought assistance from the CIA director in checking the bona fides of Iranian moderates that had been provided to him by Israeli officials, sources said.

The Israelis, led by David Kimche, a former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, had proposed opening contact with the Iranians on behalf of the United States and using an exchange of arms for release of U.S. hostages in Lebanon as a way in which both sides could show good faith.

The Israelis proposed an Iranian exile, Manucher Ghorbanifar, as a middleman who could serve as a contact with Iranian moderate leaders. Casey was told by CIA experts that their file on Ghorbanifar, which went back to his days selling arms to the shah, carried a recommendation that he could not be trusted, sources said.

The Los Angeles Times reported Saturday that Ghorbanifar failed a CIA lie detector test in 1985, but the administration, with Casey's endorsement, decided to use him as a middleman in the arms transaction.

In another development, Rep. Michael D. Barnes (D-Md.) yesterday called for a congressional investigation into unconfirmed reports that part of the profits from the Iranian arms sales were diverted into pro-contra lobbying campaigns in the United States.

Staff writers Don Oberdorfer and Thomas B. Edsall contributed to this report.

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